

Jackson/Thomas House

7053 NORTH RIDGE BOULEVARD
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

**SUBMITTED TO THE
COMMISSION ON CHICAGO HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARKS
ON DECEMBER 7, 1983**

THE JACKSON/THOMAS HOUSE
7053 North Ridge Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois

Architect: unknown

Completed: approximately 1873

Although popularly characterized "the city of neighborhoods," Chicago, in an historical sense, could very well be called "the city of villages," in recognition of the fact that many sections of the present metropolis were once independent municipalities. The area roughly encompassed by the present communities of Rogers Park and West Ridge is a case in point. Like so many others, however, these two villages were eventually absorbed by the city and the built resources associated with the early period of their independent development have been largely destroyed. Fortunately, at least one important exception in the area remains: the imposing Italianate-Second Empire Jackson/Thomas House, located on the east side of the boundary between Rogers Park and West Ridge, Ridge Boulevard.

West Ridge and Rogers Park: History and Present Character

The community areas of West Ridge and Rogers Park trace their origins to the holdings of the area's first permanent settler, Philip Rogers. In the late 1830s, Rogers purchased a six hundred acre section from the United States government in the vicinity of present Potawattomie Park. Rogers continued to add to his holdings until by the time of his death in 1856 he had acquired 1600 acres, roughly located within the bounds of the present Rogers and Touhy avenues on the north, Kedzie on the west, Pratt on the south, and Lake Michigan on the east.

During this period other settlers also came to the area. These consisted mainly of farmers who settled along the elevated glacial ridge delineated today by Ridge Boulevard. In addition to constituting the earliest locus of development, the ridge accommodated the only north-south road running into the community. The community life line, this road was used as a mail road and stage coach route.

Following Philip Rogers' death in 1856, his large estate was gradually divided. By 1869, 800 acres of this land had been bequeathed to Rogers' daughter Catherine and her husband, Patrick Touhy. Touhy, in turn, sold 100 acres of his bequest in 1871 to five Evanston residents---J. V. Farwell, S. P. Lunt, L. L. Greenleaf, C. H. Morse, and Andrew B. Jackson. These individuals then formed the Rogers Park Land Company. After quickly acquiring several hundred additional acres, they began the following year to subdivide the area bounded by Touhy on the north, Ridge on the west, Pratt on the south, and Ashland Avenue on the east, christening the streets thereby formed with their own names (the appellation of present Estes Street originally having been Jackson).

This local real estate boom, part of the city-wide boom stimulated by the Chicago Fire of 1871, was short lived however. The national financial panic of 1873, coupled with the distance of the community from the city and the erratic commuter service provided by the area's sole rail connection, the Chicago and North Western Railroad, retarded development. By 1874, only fifty homes existed in what was then called the suburb of Rogers Park. Incorporated by the Rogers Park Land Company in 1878 with boundaries fixed at Rogers, Devon, and Ridge avenues, and the lake, the village grew slowly until the late 1880s. During this period, development generally expanded eastward from the ridge and was concentrated around the Chicago and North Western railroad station, located just east of the Jackson/Thomas house, at the intersection of the present Greenleaf and Ravenswood avenues.

Immigration and expanding industrialization, facilitated by improved transportation, greatly increased Chicago's population in the late 1880s. Rogers Park was not unaffected by these trends. From 1888 to 1893, its population increased from approximately 800 to 3,500. Annexation to the City of Chicago in 1893 and its concomitant civic improvements touched off yet another population and real estate boom, and by 1910 a 7,000-member community housed predominately in single-family frame residences had grown up.

Unlike Rogers Park, which was subdivided into residential parcels quite early, West Ridge, located immediately west of the Jackson/Thomas house, remained largely agricultural through the first decade of the twentieth century. Thus, in 1895 a mere 127 residences dotted the landscape, most of these still being located near the ridge. With the single exception of the small brick Italianate-style Fortman house at 6836 North Ridge, built in 1871, the structures remaining in West Ridge from before the First World War are generally undistinguished building types, few of which were built before 1900.

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed dramatic population increases in both communities. While the area of Rogers Park east of the Chicago and North Western tracks remained largely unchanged, the eastern half of West Ridge was quickly filled with brick bungalows, flats, and apartment buildings. Although the years following World II saw the completion of development in the western portion of West Ridge and redevelopment in the eastern portion of Rogers Park, the area of each community surrounding the Jackson/Thomas house retained, almost entirely, its pre-World War II character. Thus, the house remains today a rare mid-nineteenth century survivor in the midst of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century development.

History of the Jackson/Thomas House

Because of its early date of construction, information on the Jackson/Thomas house is scarce. The following facts are known, however. The three lots upon which the present house is situated were part of the original Rogers/Touhy holdings which were sold in 1871 to Andrew B. Jackson. This Mr. Jackson, one of the five founders of the Rogers Park Land Company, eventually became president of the company, and following the incorporation of Rogers Park in 1878, was voted a member of the first Board of Trustees. He was elected president of the board shortly thereafter and continued to hold the office through 1879, the year before his

death. According to one very knowledgeable Rogers Park resident, Mr. Joseph Fortman, whose family has lived in the community since the 1840s, the house at 7053 North Ridge was built by Andrew B. Jackson in 1873. This seems to be substantiated by directory records which list A. B. Jackson residing in Evanston through 1873 and in Rogers Park in 1874.

In 1874, however, A. B. Jackson sold the southern two lots in question and the southern twenty feet of the third lot to E. G. Jackson (presumably his son, as he is listed in subsequent directories as a member of the firm of A. B. Jackson and Son) for the consideration of \$4,000. The fact that only a portion of the third lot was taken may also indicate the presence of a house at the time of the transaction; this was often done to provide ample grounds and/or a symmetrical lot for a pre-existing building. E. G. Jackson continued to own the land until 1879, although directory records reveal a checkered history of Rogers Park residency on the part of both men.

In 1879, all three lots were purchased by Mr. L. H. Thomas, a Michigan resident, for a sum equivalent to that paid by E. G. Jackson. Mr. Thomas is thereafter listed in the directories as a Rogers Park resident and a manufacturer and bottler of "Ink, Blueing, and Mucilage," with a factory also in Rogers Park. It is under the name of this Mr. Thomas, in the 1882 "Evanston City Directory," that a house is positively identified at the corner of Greenleaf and Ridge. Given the Italianate-Second Empire style of the Jackson/Thomas house and the fact that the popularity of both styles was on the wane by the early 1880s, this directory identification, in conjunction with the stylistic evidence, indicates that the present house certainly existed by 1882 and was very likely constructed several years before.

Description of the House

The Jackson/Thomas house is a two-story, single-family, frame residence. It is situated on a large, heavily foliated, inclined corner lot measuring approximately 188 feet wide by 175 feet deep, running along the top of the natural ridge followed by Ridge Boulevard. The house is sited at the crest of this ridge, is oriented west, and is approached by a terraced walk.

The present house is T-shaped in plan and measures approximately forty-three feet wide by fifty feet deep. The cross bar of the "T," which appears to be the original portion of the house, is topped by a shallow mansard roof with deep eaves. This roof is bordered at its shoulders by a wide molding raised on a short plinth. Out of the southern end of the rectangle formed by this border pokes a brick chimney. The roof is underscored by a wide molded cornice fascia and supported by large wooden ornamental brackets. These brackets feature a scrolled, highly plastic profile and are highlighted by a perforated, abstract design in the manner of the neo-Grec.

The west (front) facade is symmetrically arranged about a projecting central pavilion. This pavilion breaks through at the roofline and is topped by a deep, molded, broken pediment form with a wide, molded, raking cornice. The shoulder and return of this pediment flank a small, round-arched window with a wide molded surround. The second floor features three tall, round-arched, double-hung windows with incised geometric forms decorating the curve of the surround. They are topped

by highly plastic, shouldered, segmental arch hood molds supported by a single pair of brackets similar in design to those of the cornice. Identical window surrounds with molded sills supported on stubby brackets frame the windows of the north and south facades, and one window of the east facade.

The first floor is shaded by a deep Colonial revival style porch raised on short brick piers. The porch features fluted, Doric pilasters and free-standing columns which, in turn, support a pseudo-Doric entablature terminating in a flat roof. This porch, along with the recessed front door, front door surround, and flanking french doors were probably added about 1910.

The south facade of the house features a two-story, three-sided bay at its western end. The bay is topped by a faceted, attached semi-conical roof. Paired, round-arched windows flanked by identical single windows punctuate the bay on both floors. The eastern portion of the facade has a shallow, square bay on the first floor. This bay is primarily comprised of a molded window arcade and is accented by a cornice identical to that of the main house. Centered above this bay on the second floor is a single round-arched window. In contrast to the complexity of the south facade, the north facade is a simple plane punctuated by four identical, symmetrically arranged, round-arched windows.

Projecting from the center of the rear (east) facade is a two-story rectangular section which forms the stem of the "T." It is probably an addition, though a sensitively designed one, added at the time of the front porch. It is topped by a shallow hipped roof which terminates just below the main cornice line. This roof is enlivened by a cornice smaller but sympathetic in detail to that of the main house. The window configurations of the addition are of two varieties: rectangular and round-arched, the latter with surrounds sympathetic to those of the main house but with a flatter, less ornamental profile. The addition is flanked on the first floor by identical glazed porches, and on the south and north sides of the second floor by rectangular and original, round-arched windows, respectively.

The entire house is raised on a basement. As the lot slopes dramatically from west to east, the basement of the addition constitutes an entire story. It appears to be of concrete and is unusual in that it is adorned with cast pilasters which "support" the building sill, this sill being made to resemble a Doric architrave in a manner similar to that of the porch. The addition basement is punctuated by a central door and a tall, round-arched six-over-six, double-hung window. The latter, although of wider proportions, complements the round-arched, double-hung, two-over-two windows found in the basement under the main house. A paved walk leads from the basement door to a frame stable/garage at the rear of the lot.

The Italianate and Second Empire Styles

Typical of its period, the Jackson/Thomas house is not of one pure style, but rather a combination of several: Italianate, Second Empire, and to a very minor degree, neo-Grec. These styles generally trace their American origins to the mid-nineteenth century revolt against the regularity and restraint of the previous styles, particularly the Greek revival, which had dominated the architectural scene for so many decades, and to the simultaneous rise of the Picturesque aesthetic, based on the opposite principles of irregularity, asymmetry, and variety. The combined

presence of these styles in the house is a result of the subsequent introduction of a variety of picturesque modes and the efforts of contemporary architects and builders to maximize picturesque effect by incorporating various elements of these modes into their domestic designs.

One of the very early picturesque modes was the "Italian," first introduced in the United States in the late 1830s in the form of the Italian Villa style by Scottish-born architect John Notman, with his design of a house for the Rt. Reverend George Washington Doane of Burlington, New Jersey. The style had been well established in England since the opening of the nineteenth century and traced its origins to the English Romantic Movement, which found inspiration in the picturesque and exotic, in this case the picturesque qualities of the vernacular buildings of the Italian countryside.

In America, the style was first popularized in the 1840s by pattern-book author and advocate of the Picturesque, Andrew Jackson Downing, in his widely circulated book on landscape gardening. The style was characterized by a general emphasis on height and verticality and a concern for the picturesque effects of light and shadow. Height and verticality were principally expressed through the Italian Villa's distinctive campanile-like tower and its tall, round-arched, double-hung windows. Picturesque light and shadow effects were achieved through the use of intersecting rectangular masses, polygonal bay windows, ornamental brackets at the cornice line to support deep overhanging eaves, and classical architraves to frame windows. Other hallmarks of the style include a low-pitched roof, an "L" or "T" shaped plan, and the grouping of straight or round-headed windows into pairs or small arcades.

The irregular outline and freedom of ornament offered by the Italian Villa soon made it an exceedingly popular style in America. In the 1850s it evolved into a rectangular, almost square form often capped by a cupola and called simply "Italianate." Although the Italianate retained the vertical emphasis and details of the Italian Villa style, it was characterized by a more formal balance. Other distinguishing features included graduated window size, with exceptionally tall first floor windows giving way to standard-sized windows above; a long front porch with carved and turned balusters; recessed, double front doors; and the use of wood as the principal building material. Both variants remained popular, however, through the 1880s.

Similar in emphasis and detail to the Italian Villa and Italianate styles was the Second Empire style which made its American debut in 1850 with the New York residence of Hart M. Shiff, designed by Danish-born architect Detlef Lienau. The name of the style was derived from the reign of French emperor Napoleon III (1852-1870), during which time vast building operations were carried out in Paris, including major extensions of the Louvre. Across the Atlantic, the Second Empire style reached its greatest popularity in the late 1860s and 1870s, its formal elegance, coupled with its opportunity for lavish ornamental display holding enormous appeal for the post-Civil War nouveau riche and powerful.

Admiration of sixteenth-century French buildings such as the Louvre and Tuileries inspired the popularization of the Second Empire style's two most characteristic forms, the mansard roof and the pavilion motif. The latter, a forward projection in the elevation, generally occupied a central position in the design, was symmetrically disposed and was generally acknowledged by a corresponding break in the roof. Other stylistic attributes included segmental arched door or window

openings with emphatic hood moldings. The style did not long remain a pure one, however, and as in the case of the Jackson/Thomas house, the most popular features of the Italianate were quickly combined with those of the Second Empire. Integration of the two produced the shouldered, segmental arch window hoods likewise found on the house.

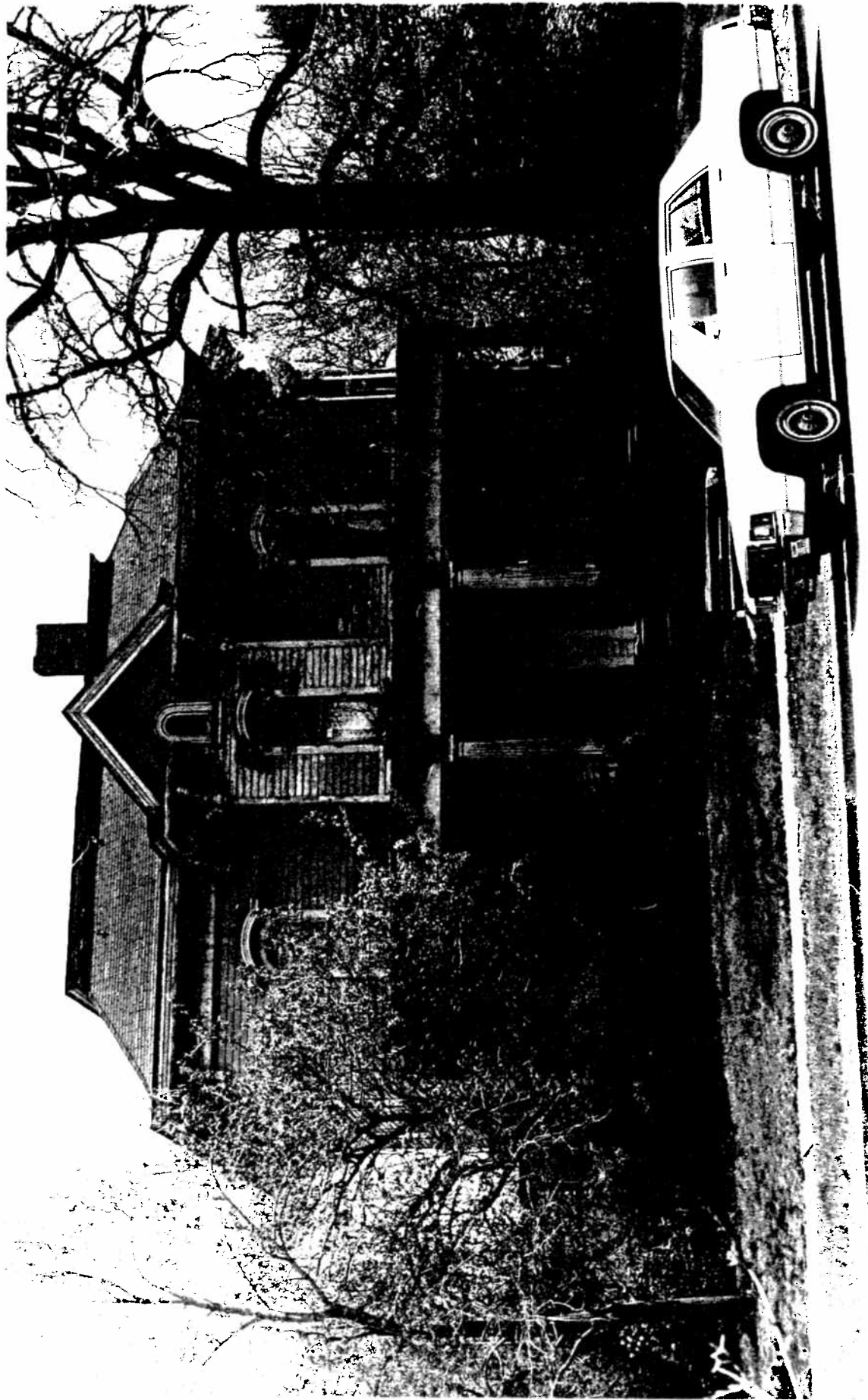
Finally, the house displays minor elements associated with yet another variant of the Italian mode, the neo-Grec style. First introduced in New York shortly after the Civil War, the neo-Grec achieved popularity in the United States between 1870 and 1885. It originated in the French Ecole des Beaux Arts in the 1840s and derived its name from the use of extremely stylized classical forms and details.

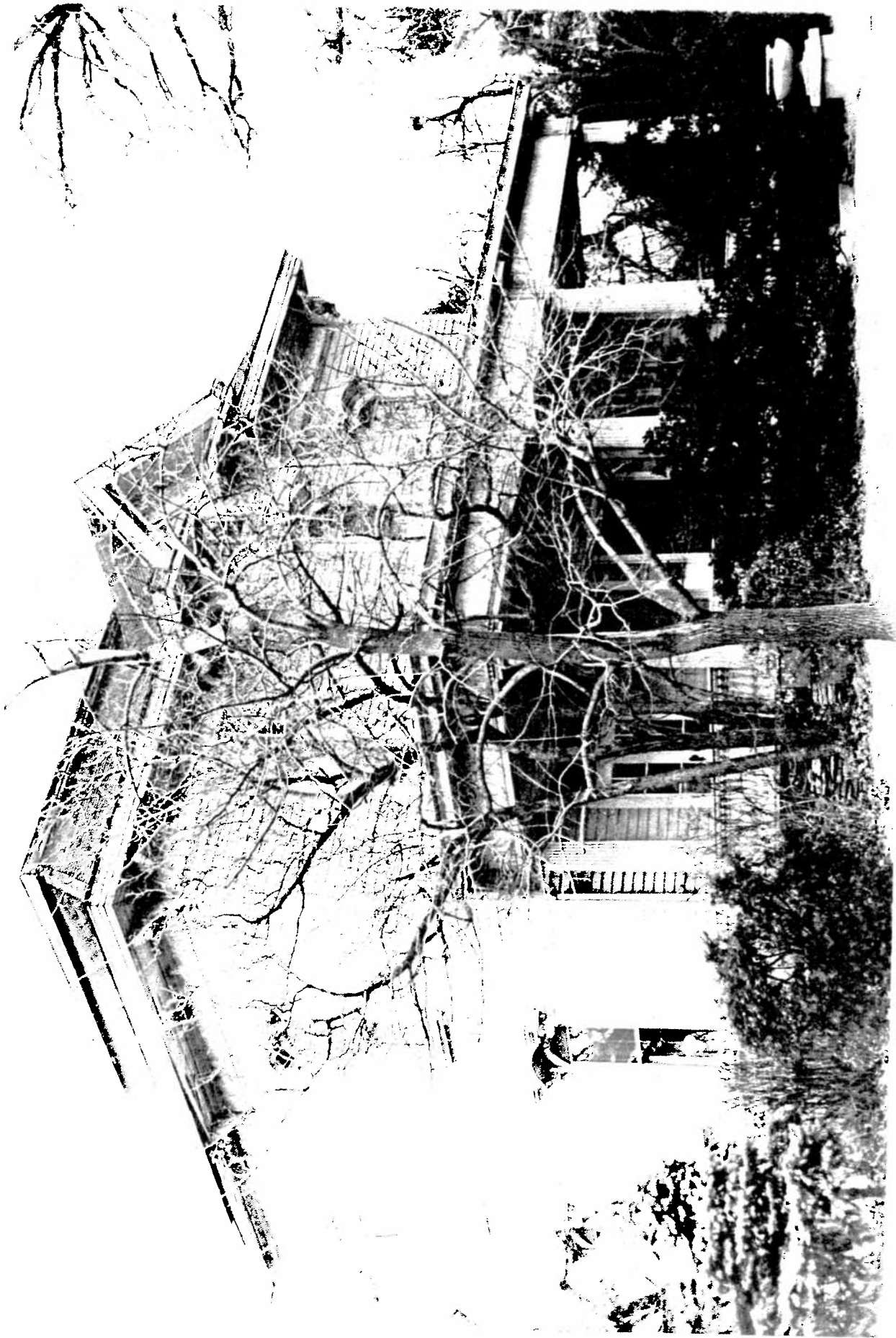
While similar in most respects to the Italianate, the forms of the neo-Grec were cleaner and more angular. Particularly characteristic was the use of flat linear detail, mechanically incised in stone, which highlighted door brackets, pilasters, and window surrounds. Aesthetics, the economy of machine-cut detail, and a burgeoning association of machine-made products with modernity account for the style's appeal. A variation of the neo-Grec's linear, incised detail is to be seen on the Jackson/Thomas house cornice brackets and window surrounds.

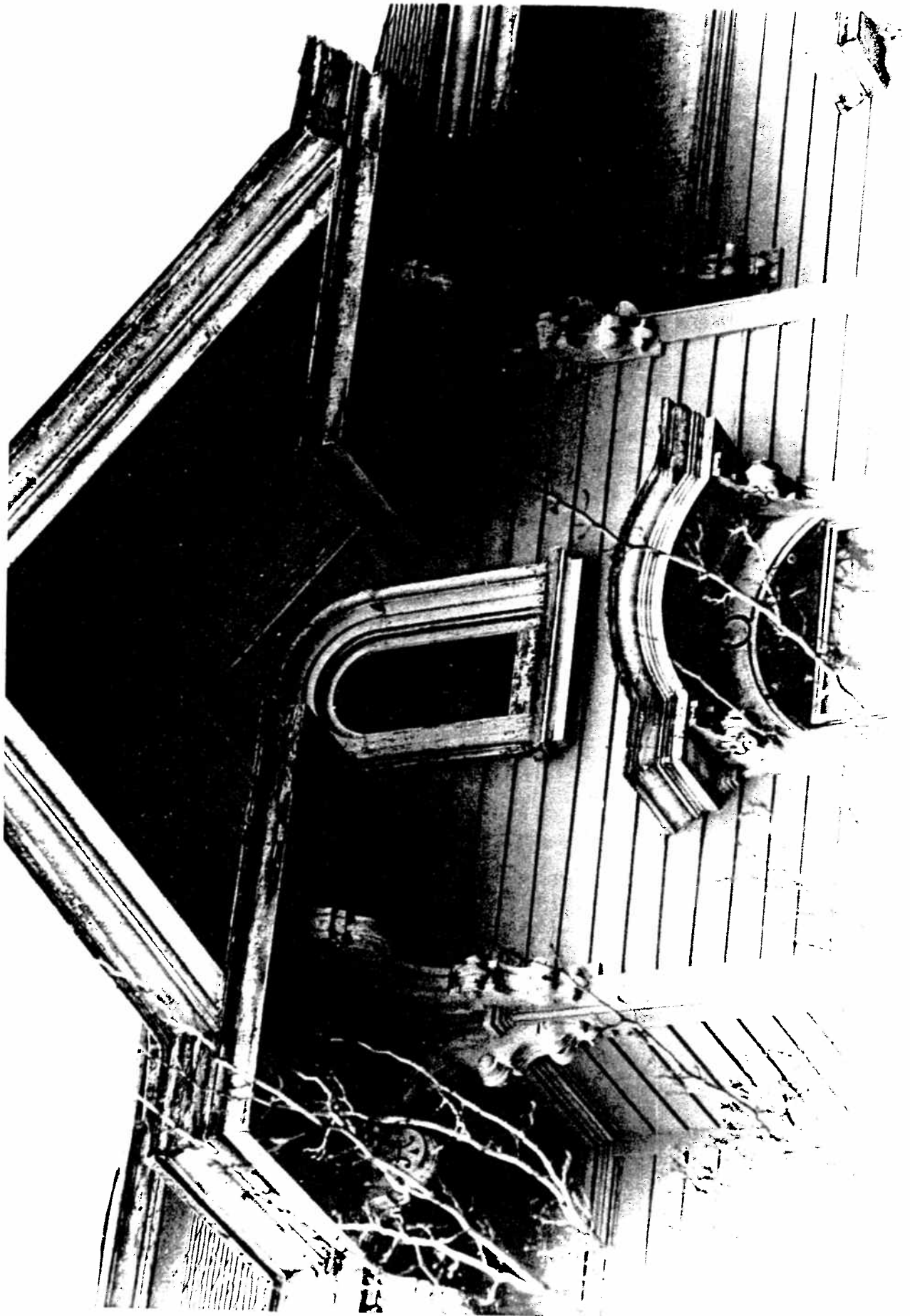
In sum, the Jackson/Thomas house is an important historical, architectural, and visual component of the Rogers Park/West Ridge community. Historically, it is one of the two, possibly three, oldest surviving structures in the vicinity of the original locus of development in the area--modern Ridge Boulevard. The house dates from the earliest period of urbanization in the area, is located within the tract of land originally subdivided by the area's first major development company, and may very well have been built by an individual prominent in both this development company and in the early history of the Village of Rogers Park.

Architecturally, the house is a fine example of suburban, eclectic Italianate design which has been minimally altered over the years. The most visible alteration, the front porch, is itself a good piece of period design which complements the style of the original structure and in all likelihood echoes the building's original porch and window configurations. Of the three contemporary Italianate residences remaining in the area, it possesses the most advanced design, and having retained its spacious original lot, is also the least encroached upon by its modern surroundings.

The house is an unusual and highly visible feature of the Rogers Park/West Ridge community by virtue of its age, the rarity of its style, its size, large lot, dramatic terrain, and prominent location at the crest on one of the area's main thoroughfares, Ridge Boulevard. As a result, it has been recognized in recent years by three independent architectural surveys: the state-wide Illinois Historic Structures Survey, which included it in its highest "potential Landmarks" category; the Commission's own Advisory Committee survey; and the Commission's ongoing Chicago Historic Resources Survey.











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